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ABSTRACT

Students are increasingly expected to be able to think critically, solve complex problems, and communicate clearly. Educators are expected to facilitate that learning in a variety of situations for an increasingly individualized student population. Therefore, educators who attempt to change their practices must become active learners. A school that encourages student and adult learning is described as a community of learners--"a place where all participants...engage in learning and teaching" (Barth 1990). This paper presents findings of a study that examined the implementation of technology into elementary classrooms in a suburban Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) school district to show the development of a school system that facilitated student and adult learning. The schools, to combat sagging teacher commitment, formed leadership teams at the district and building levels. Data were gathered through teacher interviews and document analysis. Findings show that the campus leadership teams served several functions. They provided continuous assistance and staff development; reduced isolation; increased staff capacity; provided a caring, productive environment; and promoted increased quality. One table is included. Contains 22 references. (LMI)

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The Campus Leadership Team as a Community of Learners

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Educational reform has most often been focused on the classroom product and not on the individuals who mold the product. The cry has been, "High School graduates need to be able to ..." and long lists of desirable work skills are developed by government agencies, business organizations and politically active groups. Although, the "list logic" (Barth, 1990) has also been used to create lists of desirable teacher and principal traits in an effort to improve the quality of education in public schools, the high school graduate has been a common choice for list development. For example, the SCANS Report details what skills and competencies students should acquire to be successful in a changing work environment. Educational institutions have continued to fail since "the schools - lacking clear and consistent guidance - continue with the system and methodologies they inherited from a system designed nearly 100 years ago...(Pg. 5)". While the SCANS report offers a clear and challenging set of desirable student skills to educators, a critical ingredient has been left out, the needs of a workforce (teachers) that was taught, trained, and for the most part, released into the "old" system.

The heart of the issue and what many educators are re-focusing on, relates to learning. The "old" system focused on student learning; the "new" system must focus on student *and* adult learning. Students are expected to be able to think critically, solve complex problems and communicate clearly. Educators are expected to facilitate that learning in a variety of situations for an increasingly individualized student population. The demands on all require increasing different knowledge and skills than those needed in the past. Attempting to change their practice

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requires that educators become active learners. The concept of a school that helps facilitate student and adult learning has been described from several perspectives.

Learning Communities

Barth (1990) describes such a school that encourages student and adult learning as a *community of learners*. The school becomes "a place where all participants - teachers, principals, parents, and students - engage in learning and teaching" (Pg. 43). Senge (1990) describes such a concept from a business perspective as *learning organizations*, "organizations where people continually expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Pg. 1). Joyce, Wolf, and Calhoun (1993) describe in detail the *self-renewing school* where "educators in all positions in the system create a better learning environment for themselves and students by studying education and how to improve it" (Pg. 1).

Improving instructional practices for children requires adults to learn. Learning facilitates effective change. How do we create learning environments that are conducive to change and facilitate adult learning?

The creation of a community of learners that leads to the development of a learning organization or a self-renewing school is a complex process. Boyd and Hord (1994) identify four indicators of school context conducive to change that includes reducing isolation, increasing staff capacity, providing a caring, productive environment and promoting increased quality. A learning community of adults and children can help create such a context. The core of the issue, adult learning, must be facilitated for significant change in schools. Is this another solution to educational reform without a clear road map?

Research Study

Research at a suburban Philadelphia school district on the implementation of technology into elementary classrooms provided insight into the development of a school system that facilitated student and adult learning. The District had recently purchased computers and software for use in elementary classrooms. Four computers, a printer, and integrated instructional software were provided to each classroom at four kindergarten through third grade schools and one fourth and fifth grade school. The purchase was part of a plan aimed at updating district instructional technology.

One year into the classroom technology implementation the district experienced what Fullan (1992) calls "implementation dip". Surveys showed that teacher interest and commitment were sagging, creating concern from the administration and the board of school directors. Technological innovations designed to bring about change in the classroom often fail due to poor implementation (Cuban, 1989, Trotter, 1987) resulting from a lack of understanding regarding the complexity of the change process (Fullan, 1991, 1992; Hall and Hord, 1987). The difficulties that the District experienced were not unlike other attempts at technology implementation. The surveys reflected that the individual needs of the teachers were not being met.

An outside "change facilitator" was brought into the district to help develop a plan for implementing the technology and answer questions of effectiveness from the board of school directors. A team composed of four dissertation researchers was invited to assess the effectiveness of the implementation on changing teacher attitudes toward the technology and changing actual classroom use of the technology.

A plan was established that included the formation of leadership teams at the district and campus levels to help facilitate intervention actions that would promote

the following: a vision of technology use, the establishment of teacher/student goals for classroom technology use, effective and appropriate staff development, appropriate assessment of technology use, integrated use of the technology with classroom instruction, continuous assistance for teachers, and increased knowledge by teachers of the change process.

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was utilized by the researchers to help gain an understanding of the influence of the selected intervention actions on the classroom technology use and the attitudes of teachers toward the technology. Case study methods allowed a holistic look at the unique behaviors at the campus level during the change process (Tuckman, 1988; Best and Kahn, 1989). Scheduled teacher interviews with predetermined questions were used during three site visits to document all intervention actions provided by the District. Written documentation from the schools was also collected to gather and verify the intervention actions provided to the teachers. Triangulation of data, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) were used to add reliability to the data collected.

Quantitative data were collected to assess classroom technology use and teacher attitude toward the technology. Changes in the classroom use of the technology were recorded with Innovation Configuration matrices (Hord, 1987) constructed by the research team and district personnel. The matrices described actual and desired use of the technology on a numerical continuum. Teacher attitude toward the computer was assessed using the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (Hall, George, and Rutherford, 1986), which identifies concerns that individuals experience when utilizing an innovation for the first time. The matrices and questionnaire were completed at the beginning and end of the study.

Research Results

The results of the research indicated that teacher attitude toward the technology and the classroom use of the technology improved during the study. Although not an original focus of the study, the research team realized that during the implementation plan groups of teachers, administrators, and researchers were becoming well organized and active learners. The groups of learners in the District became overlapping layers that helped facilitate the use of technology into the classrooms. Many individuals participated in the implementation plan but the leadership teams at the campus and district levels developed into two layers of learners that were considered important to the technology implementation and in helping to create what the researchers considered to be a *community of learners.*

Leadership Teams

The district leadership team was composed of two representatives from each campus team, building principals, school superintendent, director of curriculum, director of technology, external facilitator and the vendor's educational consultant. The external facilitator and the director of technology worked together to develop and facilitate meeting agendae.

Campus leadership teams were composed of volunteer teacher representatives from differing grade levels and the principal of each building. Teams ranged in size from six to fourteen members. The specific purpose of the campus leadership team was to help facilitate the interventions introduced and discussed by the external facilitator and those shared by the district leadership team members. Hopefully, their sharing and learning together would result in improved implementation and use of the classroom technology.

The district further supported the effort by paying a small stipend to one or two teachers (system operators) on each campus to monitor and support the technology effort. System operators started and shut down the computer network

each day. The system operators were on the campus leadership teams and were often the leadership team member called upon to support the needs of classroom teachers.

District Leadership Team

The district leadership team met at least once a month from August, 1993 through June, 1994 to discuss the implementation plan. The external facilitator and the director of technology hosted the meetings, usually at the district administration building. Members of this team met for 1/2 day to discuss issues surrounding the implementation plan. Initially the meetings focused on the problems relayed from the classroom teachers. The early discussions often focused on what Hord (1987) calls self concerns. Self concerns are most often seen in the early stages of implementing an innovation. Individuals need information about the innovation and want to know how they will be impacted. At the initial meetings teachers exhibited a general sense of distrust with the external facilitator, expressed concern about the expectations for computer use from the board of school directors and raised questions regarding the use of evaluation results.

As the district leadership team continued to meet to share their increasing understanding of the change process and to facilitate the implementation plan, the topics turned to the requirements of the campuses. Teachers were asked to share their expertise, participate in planning staff development, develop goals, and assess classroom use of the technology. The district leadership team, composed of teachers and central office administrators, connected classroom teachers directly to the administration of the school district. The district leadership team helped to plan and develop the actual reports campuses made to the board of school directors, providing the classroom teacher a direct link to the policy makers for the district.

Campus Leadership Teams

Campus leadership team meetings were facilitated by the building principal and addressed the details of the classroom technology implementation. Campus leadership teams met at least monthly to share information from the district leadership team meetings, to discuss and consider new insights and understanding related to school change, and to address campus concerns of the implementation. Teacher staff development needs and student/teacher goal setting were topics that were discussed in detail during the months of the research study.

Leadership teams are described in the literature as effective groups to promote change (Joyce et. al., 1993; Estes, 1990; Hall, 1988). The formal structure of the leadership teams helped to build what Fullan and Miles (1992) calls "linkages". The connections that were built provided access to the support systems within the school district, enabling effective problem solving. Teachers had direct access to the superintendent and central support staff when necessary funds or support were needed.

Intervention Actions

The intervention actions taken by the members of the district and campus leadership teams, administrators, and external consultants to help teachers implement the technology into the classroom were documented by the researchers and classified into seven categories aligned to the implementation plan. The intervention actions provided by the campus leadership team that related to continuous assistance and staff development appeared essential to the positive change in implementation at the District.

Continuous Assistance

Actions that solved teachers' personal classroom needs, allowing for continued use of the of the classroom technology were classified as *continuous assistance*. Continuous assistance actions were the most frequent form of the seven

categories of interventions provided to classroom teachers. The individuals who provided the largest percent of these actions were members of campus leadership teams (Table 1). These actions were most often provided by a single member of the leadership team to a single teacher. The types of continuous assistance actions provided to the teachers during the implementation were further categorized into mechanical or instructional.

	K-3 Campus A	K-3 Campus B	4-5 Campus C
Percent of Total Interventions that were Continuous Assistance	18	27	40
Percent of Continuous Assistance Interventions provided by Campus Leadership Team	42	47	58

Table 1. Continuous Assistance Interventions

Often a problem with a printer, computer mouse, or keyboard would cause students and an individual teacher to stop a lesson. If the teacher or one of the students in the class could not solve the problem, some form of *mechanical assistance* was needed before the computers could continue to be used. Leadership team members, who were learning from each other and increasing their expertise, were often the first person called to help solve these immediate, personal problems. This type of mechanical assistance was recorded for fifty per cent of the continuous assistance actions at the fourth and fifth grade campus (Albers, 1994) and was more common of teachers in the first year of computer use.

Classroom instruction using four computers with twenty-four to twenty-six children was reported to be very difficult. Teachers in the district were allowed to determine what software they would use in their classrooms. This ability to choose was beneficial to some but confusing to others. One teacher expressed frustration by

stating "What I have now is one of those gigantic puzzles with 10,000 pieces and every once in a while a piece falls off the table. All of a sudden you pick it up and it seems to fit."(Albers, 1994). Teachers were provided *instructional assistance* actions to help fit pieces of the puzzle together and reach the district's ultimate goal, integrate technology into classroom instruction.

Accessing specific files on the computer, demonstrating the process for enrolling new students on the computer, demonstrating how to individualize lessons to student need, and demonstrating how to utilize a specific software program were considered instructional assistance. These actions were most often provided by leadership team members to individual teachers in the classroom setting.

One campus (Albers, 1994) asked students to voluntarily submit poetry to be placed in a bound text. The principal and members of the campus leadership team developed a set of specifications that would enable the students to submit their poetry ready for print. Students were excited about having their poetry published resulting in a high level of participation in the project. Classroom teachers were not always able to provide help to the children during this project. However, campus leadership team members provided instructional continuous assistance to teachers when the specifications were not clear or when their students needed additional help to produce poetry. This project stimulated a surprising amount of learning among all involved - students, teachers and leadership team members.

Staff Development

Campus leadership teams also provided *staff development* actions to train or increase the knowledge of teachers about the implementation of the technology into the classroom. Although the type of actions were often similar to those of continuous assistance, staff development actions were always provided to groups of teachers on the campus, whereas continuous assistance was delivered one to one.

Campus leadership teams met and discussed the needs of their own teachers and prepared or requested various staff development sessions to address the needs. While the number of these staff development actions was not as great as continuous assistance, the number of teachers served for each action was higher.

One example of district developed staff development was provided by leadership team members who presented training sessions to small or large groups on the use of a word processing program. They developed and distributed computer instructions written in "laymen" terms; and they offered short, after school sessions to meet the needs of the various grade levels (Albers, 1994, Goodloe, 1994, Somers, 1994).

Leadership Team to Learning Communities

The leadership team concept helped to foster an environment that required and encouraged learning by adults. As teachers engaged in active learning, layers of learning communities began to develop and the school context became more conducive to effective change.

Reducing Isolation

The district leadership team brought together all levels of the educational system enabling top down and bottom up forces to act simultaneously on the implementation, a necessity for effective change (Fullan, 1993). The superintendent met regularly with the district leadership team as an active participant. Teachers were able to share and express concerns reducing the isolation of teachers from each other and administrators.

In one instance teachers at a district leadership team meeting were concerned regarding the use of technology data by the administration. The teachers feared that data describing student use of the technology would be used against them in a report to the board of school directors. The concern had literally stalled the meeting during the initial implementation. The superintendent, an active member of the district

leadership team, was able to resolve the issue by giving the leadership team the ability to review any information prior to its release to the board of directors . The district leadership team developed as one layer of the learning community where all levels of staff could meet and resolve issues from the classroom. The team functioned to reduce the isolation of teachers from administrators.

In another situation the leadership team shared concerns from teachers at all campuses that questioned the rationale for the evaluation of technology use in the classroom. Teachers were not in favor of allowing a research team in the district. The director of technology clearly indicated that evaluation was necessary but that the leadership team would be involved in all data analysis. The administration applied pressure for evaluation while teacher input clearly showed that they needed to understand and be involved in the assessment process.

The campus leadership team fostered a greater self-reliance for solving the day-to-day problems encountered with the technology implementation. When teachers were experiencing a problem in the classroom, leadership team members were typically contacted in an effort to resolve the matter. A leadership team member was often able to respond immediately, perhaps with a written note, a personal visit, or even by sending a student who had been trained to handle such a problem. The response of the team member not only resolved the teachers' immediate need but often equipped the teacher with the knowledge to resolve the concern in the future, and share it with other teachers.

One campus had established a box for teachers to drop technology questions written on three by five cards. The box was checked daily and leadership team members or the system operators attempted to answer any questions received within one day. As the leadership team members increased their personal knowledge of the computer system they were able to provide increasingly more technical help to their campus peers, increasing peers' self-reliance and decreasing

isolation. The continued assistance that the leadership team provided to the faculty encouraged and greatly enhanced the possibility for the campus to become what Joyce, Wolf and Calhoun (1993) consider a self-renewing school.

Increasing Staff Capacity

The leadership teams helped to increase the staff capacity by reducing the reliance on central office, providing more direct linkages to the sources of district support and by planning staff development to meet individual campus needs. The campus leadership teams developed individual building plans for assessing classroom technology use, developed a format for teacher/student goals, and developed an end-of-the-year presentation on technology use for the district board of directors. Teachers increased their knowledge and skills during the technology implementation.

Providing a Caring, Productive Work Environment

A learning community is characterized by a caring, productive environment. The District faced issues such as a contract negotiation year that interfered with the development of this aspect of a learning community, but the leadership teams encouraged the initial development of trust in the district. Teachers relied on other teachers to learn how to use the new technology, teachers made presentations to the board of school directors, and all levels of the district's educators sat down together in leadership meetings to discuss the needs of students in the classroom.

Leadership team meetings allowed an open forum for those tough issues that teachers were facing. While certainly this reduced the isolation of the teachers, the forum also increased a total understanding of teacher and administrator concerns. The meetings allowed for difficult topics to be acted upon and resolved enabling teachers to directly feel the support and concern of the administration.

Promoting Increased Quality

The interventions provided by the leadership teams had one ultimate goal: improve the use of technology in the classroom. Although the teachers were initially more concerned with personal issues than instructional quality, the research showed that the classroom use of the technology increased during the course of the study. The combined efforts of the district and campus leadership teams encouraged, provoked, and required teachers to examine their own practices for improvement.

The leadership team concept fostered the initial development of learning communities within the District. As the teachers moved forward using the technology, layers of learning communities formed in response to the collaborative atmosphere that had been created. Was this process easy?

Detours and Roadblocks

Teachers and administrators experienced a variety of emotions while learning how to use the technology and work together as a team. Teachers near to retirement commented they had no use for computers in the classroom. Union representatives were suspicious of any assessment data collected since the District was in a contract negotiation year. Teachers questioned the effectiveness of the software. Principals were suspicious of the data collected on the implementation plan. Administrators faced pressure from the board of school directors who wanted clear evaluative data to justify the purchase of the technology.

The concerns, emotions and needs experienced by individuals during change have been described as a typical component. Fullan (1993) states "Problems are inevitable, but the good news is that you can't learn or be successful without them"(Pg. 25). New theories on chaos (Wheatley, 1992, Fullan, 1993) encourage educators to embrace problems as a natural part of learning about a new way of doing. Problems become opportunities for possibilities in a learning community.

The leadership teams in the District embraced and resolved difficult issues while fostering a context conducive to change and encouraging learning by all.

Has the District completed the establishment of a learning community? No. Have they moved toward establishing components of a learning community? Absolutely!

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